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Workforce Series #9 How To Be Successful On the Job

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Workforce Series #9

How To Be Successful On the Job

By Carolyn Clague, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Extension Youth Development / 4-H Specialist

Guiding Principles for Job Success

Job success can be achieved by developing some principles to guide you throughout the days, months, and years ahead. Consider these principles and how they may fit with your current employment. Also, refer to Extension Extra 15009, *Your Appearance at Work*. Appearance does count, and how you appear to others can make or break a job opportunity or your success on the job.

Maintain a professional stance.

Be neat in what you do and wear. Speak with the confidence, authority, and maturity of a professional.

Be honest with yourself and others.

Honesty is always the best policy. But don't be naïve by confessing your negative traits and shortcomings to others.

Set goals.

Develop a clear idea of what you want and where you are going. Clear goals will direct you to job success. Convert your goals into action steps that are organized as short, intermediate, and long-range plans.

Get organized.

Translate your plans into activities. Develop an efficient and effective filing system and use a calendar to set time targets, record appointments, and compile useful information such as names and contact information.

Be a good communicator.

Assess your oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills. Many aspects of your job will probably involve communicating with others. Good communication is one of the most sought-after skills, so always present yourself well both verbally and nonverbally. Eye contact is important for effective face-to-face communication. Listen to your voice for pitch, tone, volume, and clarity as you speak to others face-to-face or over the telephone.

Be energetic and enthusiastic.

Employers are attracted to positive people. Generate enthusiasm both verbally and nonverbally. Check your

telephone voice—it may be more unenthusiastic than your voice in face-to-face situations.

Be a producer.

Present yourself as someone who gets things done and achieves results—a producer. Employers seek people who are bright, hard working, responsible, communicate well, have positive personalities, maintain good interpersonal relations, are likable, observe dress and social codes, take initiative, are talented, possess expertise in particular areas, use good judgment, are cooperative, trustworthy and loyal, generate confidence, are credible and are conventional. In other words, they like people who score in the “excellent” to “outstanding” categories of their performance evaluations.

Ask questions.

Your best information comes from asking questions. Learn to develop intelligent questions that are non-aggressive, polite, and interesting to others. Do not ask too many questions and thereby become labeled as someone who “talks too much” or is a critic.

Be a good listener.

Being a good listener is often more important than being a good questioner or talker. Learn to improve your face-to-face listening behavior and remember to use information gained from others. Make others feel they enjoyed talking with you.

Be polite, courteous, and thoughtful.

Treat everyone with respect. Avoid being aggressive or too assertive. Try to be polite, courteous, and gracious to everyone. Your social graces will be noticed. If people help you, compliment them or send thank you letters or greeting cards.

Thank people who have helped you.

Take a few minutes to write short notes to people who have helped you in your job search. Let them know what you are doing and thank them for their support. This simple act will be appreciated and remembered.

Don't gossip.

Be tactful and be careful what you say to others about other people and your background. Don't be a gossip, backstabber, or confessor.

Become an expert.

Study something that interests you and that you can get passionate about. Gain knowledge and insights about the subject. Becoming an expert not only bolsters your confidence but also keeps your mind active. It makes you a more interesting person and gives you a broader perspective.

Be a volunteer.

Volunteering will help you become a more well-rounded person and show your commitment to the community. Deciding to be a volunteer is the first step. Next, make sure that you are volunteering for the right place, the right position, and for the right reasons. You want to have a good fit, gain satisfaction from your experience, and do the most good for all those involved. You need to consider the organization's mission and involvement of volunteers, your motivation, your skills and resources, whether you have to learn new skills, and what your expectations are. Use your preferences to help you decide what volunteer roles and organizations best suit you.

Join a support group.

Job and career support groups have become varied and popular. People are eager to help others. If you feel that you can help others, this is good for them and good for you, too.

Develop a positive attitude toward yourself.

Nobody wants to employ guilt-ridden people with inferiority complexes. Focus on your positive characteristics.

Listen to self-help tapes.

Listening to audiotapes that are designed to bolster your self-esteem and confidence can be effective against negative messages that you may be sending yourself. You can check out audiotapes from most libraries. Most bookstores also carry self-help audiotapes and books.

Don't get into a rut.

A routine can be a good thing if it is producing good results. If the routine is not getting you anywhere, change it. The changes do not have to be dramatic. Get up an hour earlier every day. Listen to different radio stations. Add some changes to your work.

Associate with positive and successful people.

Avoid associating with negative people who complain and have a "you-can't-do-it" attitude. Run with winners who have a positive "can-do" outlook on life.

Identify the superstars.

Study the employees in your organization and identify who are the winners. These are the people with outstanding track records—the top in sales, the creative geniuses, or the dynamic managers. They are easy to spot because their accomplishments are well known. Observe these superstars and emulate their approaches to the job.

Spend time with people who make you feel good.

Periodically schedule yourself to be with people whose company you enjoy and with whom you feel comfortable. Do not burden these people with your problems. Otherwise, they may not be too eager to be with you.

Read biographies of successful people.

Successful people have often failed and reading about their lives can be a source of inspiration. They can give you a new perspective on your challenges.

Keep a journal.

Buy a notebook or use your computer and get into the habit of putting your thoughts down on paper for 10 to 15 minutes a day. A journal is not a diary; it is not an hour-by-hour accounting of what you did, where you went, and with whom you talked. It is simply a mirror for your ideas and feelings, and it can be a catalyst for new ideas or approaches. You do not have to worry about how interesting or compelling your ideas are. Write from the heart. Whatever you are feeling, write it down. You will be surprised at how useful or at least calming this exercise can be.

Recharge your batteries.

Your mental and physical self may need to be recharged. Take time for a vacation or stay at home to relax, decompress, and clear your head.

Give yourself time off.

Give yourself permission to designate at least one day every week (not a work day) for a mental vacation. On that day, do not talk or even think about anything related to your job.

Be open-minded.

You should welcome serendipity or the unexpected. Learn to re-evaluate your goals and strategies. Seize new opportunities if they appear appropriate. Remain positive for potential improvements.

Accept new orders.

You are going to be expected to accomplish more with less support than you may be used to. Embrace the challenges. Keep in mind that competition and service is important in today's world.

Clarify expectations.

Periodically, it is good to evaluate and clarify expectations with your supervisor. Take time to write down your understanding of your key responsibilities. The questions you want to have answered might include the following: What is the overall mission of the organization, and how do my department and job fit into that mission? What immediate priorities and challenges need to be addressed? On what basis will my job performance be evaluated?

Don't push for change too soon.

After you have established yourself and earned some credibility in your job, you can begin to ask questions, express your point of view, and work for change. If you push for change soon after you are hired, you run the risk of falling on your face and also of alienating people whose support may be critical to your success.

Be discreet about your salary.

Never tell anyone how much you are being paid. And never ask anyone else about their salary. It is unprofessional and invariably will come back to haunt you. Generally, only your supervisor and human resources professionals need to know this information.

Get yourself up to speed technically.

If your job obliges you to work with technology—such as computers or software packages—with which you are

not yet proficient, arrange your time to seek assistance and study to master these skills.

Keep your guard up.

Keep yourself mentally prepared for your job. Network with others and learn about their activities. Keep current. Be visible.

Be patient and persevere.

No doubt you will have disappointments, so do not be discouraged by set-backs. Be patient with yourself and others. Be willing to try again.

Evaluate your progress and adjust.

Take some time to evaluate what you are doing and accomplishing. If necessary, re-adjust your plans and reorganize your activities and priorities. Don't become too routinized and thereby kill creativity and innovation.

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